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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION: TOPONYMIC GUIDELINES FOR MAP AND OTHER EDITORS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place-names: guidelines for recording and use

Paper submitted by Australia**

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Introduction

The 1990 meeting of the Committee for Geographical Names in Australia (held in Perth, Western Australia on the 19th and 20th August, 1990) established a sub-committee consisting of William Watt (South Australia) as the convener, Ian Elliot (Western Australia) and Aden Ridgeway (New South Wales).

The purpose of this sub-committee was to establish guidelines for the recording and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names.

The sub-committee met in Adelaide, South Australia, in December 1991 to consider this issue. The outcome of this meeting was the creation of a main objective, policy objectives and a series of guidelines aimed at achieving the objectives.

The objectives and guidelines are detailed in attached Appendix.

Discussion

Basic to the formulation of the draft guidelines was the concept of self determination.

This concept involves the fundamental right of any people to be involved in the decision making process relating to any issue that impacts on them.

Flowing from the self determination concept is the need to establish an effective

consultation processes, both at the stage of the creation of the guidelines and during all recording programs.

The concept of self determination and the resultant consultation processes are seen as the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names research. This issue must not be taken lightly, and requires an undertaking by the nomenclature authorities, anthropologists and linguists involved in the recording to abide by the concept.

In relation the draft guidelines, an extensive consultation process has been entered into. Copies have been distributed to as many communities, agencies and individuals as possible to achieve the greatest response to the ideas put forward. Once the replies are received, the guidelines will be revised as required.

Once the guidelines have been finalised, each nomenclature authority will be encouraged in initiate recording programs aimed at recording as many place names, together with the details relating to derivation and meaning and association with dreaming stories. Any information recorded must be subject to authorisation by the relevant communities prior to further use.

However, the more information recorded now, the more that will be available for the future generations to make their own decision as what names are used. Hierarchies of data bases can be established to cater for the preservation of sacred/secret details, each with varying levels of access.

It must be accepted by the general community and by the nomenclature authorities that as well as having a mapping and communication role, the nomenclature authorities have a significant cultural role to play in the retention and restoration of the heritage embodied within place names.

The Future

As mentioned above, there is an extensive consultation process established to obtain maximum input regarding the guidelines. This input is expected from a number of different areas, including:-

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals.
- Federal, State and Local Government agencies.
- Heritage/History bodies.
- Linguists and anthropologists.

Assessment of the comments received will be undertaken by the subcommittee, and it is expected that this matter will be discussed at length at the Committee for Geographical Names in Australia meeting scheduled for September 1992.

Appendix

Main Objective

That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names are recognised as being part of Australian heritage and need to be preserved.

Policy Objectives

1. The names of places as given by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be recognised.

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names be preferred for features that do not have an officially recorded name.

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are to be consulted in all dealings concerning Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place names in their area, in line with self determination policies.

4. The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Convention for the Representation of Tribal and Language Names be adopted as a starting point for the development of a writing system for any specific language that does not have a present system.

5. Nomenclature authorities undertake to educate the community in the use and pronunciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names.

6. Nomenclature authorities be committed to the on-going development of appropriate procedures to facilitate the recording and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names.

7. Nomenclature authorities seek the involvement of other interested groups (eg local government authorities, language centres, Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, heritage bodies, National Parks authorities).

Guidelines

1. **Recognition**

1.1 Any use of names of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin should only be done following consultation and with appropriate recognition.

1.2 Recognition of the self determination concept and its importance in contributing to place names issues.

1.3 A recognition of the use of traditional names for places and localities already officially named and recorded by nomenclature authorities.

1.4 A recognition that more than one name can exist for any particular feature, both within a specific language group and from two or more language groups.

1.5 A recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander names were in use prior to European occupation.

1.6 A recognition that the oral recording of place names in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has equal standing with written recording.

1.7 A recognition that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names may be subject to restrictions which must be respected.

1.8 A recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural expectations.

2. **Preferences**

2.1 That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names be preferred.

2.2 The preference be stated for the spelling and accenting of the place names to agree with the rules of the written form of language from which the place names originate.

2.3 There should be no interference with established indigenous place names without the consent of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.

2.4 Ensure that during the development, and after the adoption of policy and guidelines, that there is involvement of participants representing a diversity of interests, including government at all levels, non-government and voluntary organisations.

2.5 Adjustments can be made to the spelling of place names in consultation with the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and their linguist if the current form is under threat of mispronunciation by the wider public.

2.6 Appropriate follow up be done with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to show the results of any specific field work or project.

2.7 Linguists should be consulted to maintain standards of excellence in the written form.

2.8 Local government bodies, National Parks and Wildlife agencies, heritage bodies etc. should be consulted as required.

2.9 Authorisation is to be obtained from the relevant community for the use of any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander name or word taken from any source in official naming.

2.10 Questions of copyright of any data collected during any field trips/investigations must be resolved.

2.11 The wishes of the relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Communities in relation to a name or associated information

must be respected.

2.12 Consultation must try to meet the expectations of all involved parties, however, failing complete agreement, a consensus of opinion is to be aimed for.

3. **Writing Systems**

3.1 Where a writing system already exists and is in use by the community, that system should be used (Pitjantjatjara, etc).

3.2 Where no writing system exists, the AIATSIS convention be used as a starting point for the development of a writing system.

3.3 Ease of pronunciation be a criteria for the writing of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place names.

3.4 English generic terms may be used if considered necessary to specify the type of feature involved.

3.5 Extinct languages will require the assistance of a linguist to enable accurate renditions of the names to be determined.

3.6 The language source of each place name is to be noted.

4. **Education**

4.1 A commitment by nomenclature authorities to undertake an educative role to popularise correct pronunciation and spelling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names.

4.2 Nomenclature authorities and the CGNA to undertake an educative role to develop positive international perspectives.

4.3 Assist in the education of the wider community about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and the importance of place names to that culture.

4.4 Impart a realisation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names represent a gift from another culture, the sharing of which imposes ethical obligations on users.

4.5 To create an awareness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the importance of being able to preserve Aboriginal culture through place names and minimise the encroachment of European names upon the landscape, especially for features of high cultural significance.

4.6 Foster a knowledge among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

that their wishes will be respected.

4.7 Educate nomenclature authority staff in appropriate consultative mechanisms.

4.8 Create an awareness among nomenclature authority staff of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and culture.

5. Procedural

5.1 A dual naming system may be used as a management tool for the naming of physical and environmental features of significance to the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community when an official name already exists and when a name change is not possible or acceptable.

5.2 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander names or terms from one area not be applied to other areas for official naming purposes.

5.3 Local historical and cultural information relating to the meaning and origin of the place names be collected.

5.4 Previous relevant surveys by anthropologists, linguists and others be used as a resource prior to any field work.

5.5 Names and spellings may be changed to avoid duplication of names, present a better vehicle for correct pronunciation and provide for better cultural retention.

5.6 Roman characters should be used.

5.7 Where alternative spellings of a name exist, only one official spelling should be used following consultation with the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.

5.8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names are to be actively sought.

5.9 States/Territory agree to co-operate in undertaking joint field projects where common State/Territory boundaries have no meaning to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and language.